Legal
Services
Society

British Columbia
www.lss.bc.ca

News Release

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Public support for legal aid increases

Vancouver, BC — The vast majority of BC residents continue to support legal aid, according to a public opinion poll conducted in December.

This was the second annual poll commissioned by LSS to determine the levels of public awareness of and support for legal aid. This year, once legal aid was described to respondents, 93% said they support the services (up from 89% last year). More than half — 54% — expressed strong support for legal aid.

"These results show that the BC public believes a truly meaningful, fair, and effective justice system must include legal aid services for low income people," says LSS Executive Director Mark Benton.

Interviewers told respondents that legal aid provides "low income people with legal information, advice, and/or representation in court. This can include providing them with a self-help kit, giving them a few hours of legal advice or paying a lawyer to represent them in court for serious family, criminal, or immigration/refugee problems."

Although few respondents said they know a fair amount or a lot about legal aid (18%), those who reported knowing nothing about our services dropped to 20% (compared to 25% in 2005).

Earlier this year, the Ontario and Alberta legal aid plans conducted their own public opinion polls, which had similar results to BC's. Of those polled, more than 85% in Ontario and 96% in Alberta support legal aid services.

Like last year, half the BC respondents believed legal aid was inadequately funded, and more respondents (78% compared to 73% in 2005) said they agree with the statement that "governments should give funding for legal aid the same priority as they give to funding for other social services such as health care, education, welfare, and child protection."

The poll was conducted for LSS by Ipsos Reid as part of the December 2006 BC Reid Express provincial omnibus survey. Interviewers asked 745 people 11 questions about legal aid. The margin of error is ±3.6% 19 times out of 20.

A more detailed summary of the poll results was prepared by Ipsos Reid and is available under About LSS - Reports – Evaluations and reports (2005/2006) on the society's website.

For further information, contact:

Mark Benton, Executive Director
Legal Services Society (604) 601-6004

LSS is an independent, non-profit organization that has provided legal aid to people with low incomes in BC since 1979.

Legal representation is available for serious family, child protection, and criminal issues. It is also available for some immigration, mental health law, and prison law matters.

Legal advice is available at most courts through duty counsel and by telephone through LawLINE and the Brydges Line (both are province-wide toll-free lines).

Legal information is available through Legal Information Outreach Worker (LIOW) services, LawLINE, plain language publications, and Internet services, including the Electronic Law Library, Family Law in BC, LSS, and LawLINK websites. (See www.lss.bc.ca for most of our publications, our catalogue, and website links.)

*To contact the **LSS Call Centre** and **LawLINE**, dial: (604) 408-2172 (Lower Mainland) or 1-866-577-2525 (toll free from outside the Lower Mainland).*

Suite 400
510 Burrard Street
Vancouver, BC V6C 3A8

Tel: (604) 601-6000
Fax: (604) 682-7967